DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 619 FL 002 195

AUTHOR Nixon, St. John B.
TITLE The Role of the Foreign Language Programme: A Definition of Ends and Means.
PUB DATE Aug 68
NOTE 8p.
JOURNAL CIT Kwartaalbericht Stichting Nijenrode; v10 n38 p34-41 Aug 1968

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Audiolingual Methods, *Business Education, Business Skills, *College Language Programs, Colleges, Curriculum Design, *Intensive Language Courses, International Education, *Language Instruction, *Modern Languages, Second Language Learning, Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Language instruction for business students at Nijenrode College, Holland, is the focus of this article. The basic philosophy and development of the program currently offered are aimed at improving better coordination among departments in order to provide students with an integrated set of faculties which will qualify them to perform the functions of international business successfully. The author describes the role of language as viewed at the school, languages taught, teaching methods, and audiovisual instruction in the language laboratory. (RL)

ED050619

The role of the foreign language programme: a definition of ends and means

St. John B. Nixon

Ever since Nijenrode started in 1946, modern languages have occupied a significant place in the programme of studies. Already at the beginning, when the College was struggling to define its objectives and devise the means of achieving them, it was recognised that the teaching of a language was a means to an end and not an end in itself. In that period of exultancy following the liberation, a realistic appraisal of ends and means was sometimes impeded by a fanciful preoccupation with the brave new world, but, fortunately, those who had the task of planning the curriculum were not visionaries, but men of vision who realised that the programme had to be made as utilitarian as possible in order to prepare the students for their future careers as businessmen. It is revealing to study the Nijenrode prospectus for 1947 and see how the English syllabus, for example, was designed to lead to a well-specified end: "*Bij de idiomatische oefeningen bijzondere aandacht voor de vak-vocabulaire van de bedrijfstak, waarin de leerling een werkkring hoopt te vinden. Het maken van verslagen van allerlei aard, speciaal ook van de bezoeken aan kantoren, fabrieken en bedrijven en van rapporten over practische arbeid die de leerling daar heeft verricht. Het houden van voordrachten over onderwerpen betreffende genoemde en aanverwante bedrijven.*'

In the meantime, society has been changed almost beyond recognition by the machines of communication, and a world-wide revolution in linguistic education, accelerated by the launching of the first Russian sputnik in 1954, has begun to make itself felt at classroom level. In the intervening years, the aim of teaching languages for the sake of their vocational utility has not changed at all, but this continuity of purpose does not mean that the methods used to achieve it have been in a state of repose.

Language as an implement

'*Language is an implement*' said H. G. Wells, '*quite as much as an implement of stone or steel.*' Indeed, it is an implement that has two functions, social and non-social. Its social function is as an instrument of communication, which enables people to understand, and be understood by, those near to them, but also as a medium that stretches between them and others far removed in space and time. Its non-social function is to enable the individual to formulate and sustain his own thoughts, to ratiocinate as a cognitive being. It stands to reason that the learning of a foreign language has as its purpose the discharge of a social function, inasmuch as it allows the

FL 002 195

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

individual to communicate with the world at large. Accordingly, the scope of the language programme at Nijenrode is limited to the everyday use of language, both spoken and written, and does not concern itself with the higher uses, that is to say, language which transcends the limits of ordinary daily life and does not lead immediately to practical ends. Hence, little attention is paid to literature, linguistics or the language of science and technology. Language for his everyday needs, including the need to earn his living, is the implement that the student must be able to handle with the utmost skill. As a coming businessman, he must be as proficient in writing as in speaking, since both abilities will be indispensable in his career, perhaps not always at the same time, but certainly during different stages or in particular situations, according to the direction taken by his job. He is taught to speak in the language lab and to write in the lecture room and his progress in each is tested regularly.

Which languages?

The proximity of Holland to France, Germany and the British Isles and the fact Dutch is a language proverbially unintelligible to most foreigners are among the reasons why it is crucially important for the Dutch businessman to know his languages. The task of Nijenrode is the formation of a cadre for future management, especially in the export sector. Therefore, English, French and German, the three most useful languages commercially, are taken compulsorily by all students. The same holds good for Dutch, which is gradually being transformed into a new subject to be called Communication.

In addition to the compulsory languages, a student is encouraged, but not compelled, to choose one other language for study out of Spanish, Swedish and Russian, all of which, unlike those in the compulsory group, are beginners' languages for the majority of students entering Nijenrode. Malay, later renamed Bahasa Indonesia, ceased to be taught in 1957 because of its diminished commercial usefulness and Arabic in 1967, when a decision to raise German to the status of a compulsory language was taken. The inclusion of Italian as an optional language is under consideration. If it is introduced, it will become a concentrated, intensive third-year course offering an alternative to Spanish, Russian and, if there is a sufficient demand for it, Arabic.

The compulsory languages

When the new students arrive at Nijenrode after taking their Eindexamen there is generally little appreciable difference in the foreign language ability of those who have attended the various kinds of secondary school. But family background and the places where they live do appear to exercise a strong influence. Grades awarded for English, for example, in the last year

at school are usually a good indication of ability in writing, but often bear little relationship to ability in speaking. Because of their scanty vocabulary, few new students can **read** English, French or German effortlessly. They enjoy reading novels, but mostly skip through them without really understanding much of the printed page. Most of them at this stage are able to **understand** conversation, although many will never have had an opportunity of talking to an educated native for any length of time. Few can **write** well. Idiom and vocabulary are handled clumsily. Spelling is generally abominable. Our first task is to encourage the new student to buy a reliable dictionary and discard the pocket dictionary, to which he has clung affectionately until now. The next step is to teach him systematically how to use this new tool.

The ability to **speak** English, French and German varies enormously at the time of admission. A small number of students is scarcely able to utter the simplest kind of sentence, although some will have won respectable marks in the Eindexamen. Another minority, usually thanks to special circumstances, is not far short of native proficiency. The rest fall into two categories of roughly the same size: those who are fair and those who are good. Their ability in speaking these languages is tested during the first few weeks after their arrival. If the ages of these young people, the number of subjects they have had to study at school, and the few opportunities they have enjoyed of visiting the countries concerned or talking with native speakers are taken into consideration, there does not seem to be too much to complain about, so far as their fluency in speaking is concerned.

The optional languages

Spanish and Swedish tend to vie with one another as the most popular of the optional languages, while Russian, understandably enough, attracts but a small number of enthusiasts. Instruction extends from the beginners' to the intermediate level. A knowledge of Spanish is an important asset for the Dutch businessman. While there are between eighty and a hundred old students employed in Spanish-speaking countries, there are also many others who are using it here in the Netherlands as employees in export departments. Swedish, too, is a language which justifies its inclusion in the foreign language programme, since it offers a medium for communication not only in Sweden herself, but also in Norway, Denmark and Finland, countries which together play a significant role in the Dutch economy. [1]) It is also worth noting that industrial Sweden with her ultra-modern manufacturing systems and progressive welfare schemes offers unique opportunities for investigation and is very generous in accepting Nijenrode students each year for work-and-study attachments to business and manufacturing concerns.

Dutch language for foreign students

At the present time, one in eight students at Nijenrode is a foreigner:

350 Dutchmen, 30 Americans and 20 of other nationalities. Most of these 50 foreigners have a good knowledge of English and many have an Anglo-Saxon background. For many years, the necessity to teach them Dutch so that they could take part in simple conversations and generally achieve a closer identity with their host country was a problem that teased the wits of the many tutors who were successively asked to solve it. The audio-visual method of teaching in the language lab has now greatly simplified the task. All American students and students in the International Branch are required to attend an intensive course. Introduction to Dutch, during their orientation period, at the end of which they have the option of continuing during the first trimester for three hours a week. Experience has shown that a short, intensive course telescoped into three months is a more effective way of teaching Dutch than a course spread over the whole year. This applies particularly to the American students, who are at Nijenrode for one year only and whose enthusiasm for learning Dutch inevitably declines, as the time for their homeward journey draws near.

Co-ordination of method

A monolingual system of teaching the three compulsory languages is preferred. English is used for teaching English, French for teaching French etc. With the optional languages starting at the elementary level, Dutch is preferred as the medium of instruction. The language department is divided into sub-sections, in most of which a native instructor shares the teaching duties with his Dutch colleague. Thus, native instructors are to be found in the English, French, German and Spanish sections. Particularly for the spoken language and the preparation of courses in the language lab, the presence of native instructors has special advantages for language teaching and affords the student extra opportunities for practising his foreign languages socially outside the lecture room.

The coordination of teaching methods and syllabuses is a matter of absolute necessity, yet notoriously difficult to achieve, especially when, as at Nijenrode, there are so many language activities in progress at the same time. As the various languages are inevitably being taught at different levels, the application of fixed standards common to all languages is not artificially enforced, although, of course, English, French and German do recognise a common interpretation of what is meant by 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' etc. But a constant effort is made to ensure that the contents of each syllabus, especially the commercial components, are the same for all three. Furthermore, the language department is striving all the time to achieve uniformity of method in order that the system most appropriate for the successful fulfil-

ment of teaching objectives can be employed to advantage by the various instructors concerned.

Synchronisation, in addition to coordination, is also of great importance. If one instructor is teaching a particular aspect of the language in the lecture room one day, then his colleague in the language lab must be practising the students in that same aspect as soon as possible afterwards, lest the value of each instructor's contribution be nullified.
With so many different factors at play, perfect coordination will never be fully attainable, but at least everybody is in agreement about the main principles of language teaching today.

Language teaching theories

Language teaching today relies on two main theories, which are technically referred to by the cumbersome names: the audio-lingual habit (ALH) theory and the cognitive code-learning (CCL) theory. When translated into classroom practice, each of these theories in a varying degree provides the impulse that directs the language teaching mechanism at Nijenrode.

The ALH theory is more or less the one adopted by the reform movement, which has its chief adherents in the United States, France and the Soviet Union. Based mainly on a monolingual approach to language teaching and learning, it embraces three important principles:

1. Since speech is primary and writing secondary (the second being a symbolisation of the first), the habits to be learned must first be inculcated as auditory and vocal responses.
2. Habits must be made automatic, so that the learner can use them instinctively.
3. Instinctive reaction can most easily be achieved through constant practice.

These three tenets of the ALH theory have begotten many new practices in language teaching, among which the language lab, structure drills, mimicry-memorisation techniques, and various types of programmed learning, and been responsible for injecting new vigour into language teaching methodology at Nijenrode.

The CCL theory, on the other hand, which is a modified and modernised version of what was formerly called the grammar-translation method, has a bilingual approach and views the learning of a second language mainly as a process of acquiring conscious control of its grammatical and phonological characteristics. Fundamentally, it attaches more importance to the learner's understanding of the structure of the target language than to his ability to reproduce that structure in writing or speaking, since, provided the learner has a proper degree of cognitive control over the structure, power of ex-

pression will be engendered automatically, as the language is called into use in significant situations. The gradual shift, at Nijenrode, away from the methods springing from the CCL philosophy is reflected in an everincreasing reliance on programmed instruction and the abandonment of paradigmatic methods, whereby linguistic elements are subjected to intense scrutiny as isolated phenomena rather than as constituents of the very contexture of a language. Notwithstanding, in the case of languages such as Spanish, Swedish and Russian, which are taught initially at beginner's level, it is difficult to find a reason for objecting to the use of this last system, because the theoretical character of the teaching can be transformed into practical training in active speech by means of the language lab, provided the two types of lesson are synchronised. [2])

Audiovisual instruction in the language lab

The need for the Nijenrode student to attain a peak of fluency in spoken language as a qualification for his business career has already been stressed. Formerly, skill in speaking was secondary to skill in writing for the mere reason that the resources of the conventional classroom were incapable of affording practice in everyday discourse of groups consisting of twenty students or more. But, about ten years ago, Nijenrode began to get wind of important new ideas in the field of applied linguistics and, since 1962, when the first language lab was installed, it has been in the forefront of experimentation and innovation. Five years later, a second lab was installed. The sixty booths and the multiplicity of audiovisual equipment that can be called into use for different kinds of teaching activity have created an unprecedented enlargement of instructional opportunities.

It would be beyond the writer's present task to describe in detail the facilities available. These differ but little from those of other labs. We have developed at Nijenrode, however, techniques of presentation which make simultaneous use of sound and image as the two main components of the contextual framework in fulfilment of the familiar, but often unheeded axiom that information presented visually can be assimilated more easily than information presented aurally and that, in language instruction, the auditory element should be fortified as much as possible by the visual element. [3])

The ALH theory tends to stress automaticity and to relegate conscious recognition of meaning to second place in importance, but, if exercises take place within a contextual framework, mastery is accomplished through the function of recognition.

Plans for a third year of study

The description given so far of the language teaching programme relates mainly to the present situation, but a decision has been taken to extend the

two-year course to three years. When implemented, this decision will necessitate a far-reaching reorganisation, which will enhance the opportunities available to the language department. The plan, in brief, envisages that all students will take English, French and German as compulsory subjects throughout the three-years course. At the end of Year I, they will have the opportunity to choose either Spanish or Swedish, provided that conditions mentioned hereafter are satisfied, as a two-year course. Alternatively, a student can wait until Year III if he wishes and then choose either Spanish 2 (an intensive course) or Russian or (possibly) Italian or (possibly) Arabic, whichever he deems to be the most useful for his business career. No student will be permitted to follow at any stage more than the four compulsory languages (including Dutch as a 'communication' subject) plus one optional language, but it will be permissible to take the compulsory languages only. Barriers erected at the end of Year I and Year II will prevent the weaker learner from following an optional language and putting too big a strain on his capacity. Spanish 2 in Year III will be introduced as a rapid course for the benefit of students who, for one reason or another, do not elect to take Spanish at the beginning of Year II.

It is believed that this plan, which has flexibility coupled with symmetry and keeps vocational objectives steadily in sight, will offer the student an effective quota of foreign language tuition, giving ample scope to the talented learner, while protecting the less gifted learner against his weaknesses. Furthermore, it establishes a realistic system of priorities. On the one hand, there are the three most important languages for business at the present time in the compulsory group; on the other, there is a choice of 'tweede talen' or optional languages, available for those who have already given proof of their competence to follow them. Spanish, although belonging to the optional group, will continue to occupy a medial position, but one that, befitting its importance as a world commercial language, is distinctly more advantageous than is at present the case.

Conclusion

Language teaching like all other forms of teaching, can never be perfect, but I hope that I have shown that we are forging a system which has a recognisable Nijenrode imprint. We are trying all the time to achieve a better coordination, not only of the teaching elements which the language department has at its disposal, but also with the other departments, Algemene Wetenschappen and Bedrijfswetenschappen, in order to equip the students not so much with a number of separate skills, but with an integrated set of faculties which will qualify them to perform the functions of business successfully. The task of teaching languages for a set purpose is simplified by various advantages that the typical character of Nijenrode has to offer. Among these is the fact that it is modern in outlook, that it is constantly seeking new opportunities for contact with the world outside in keeping with its international character, and that it is prepared to try out new dis-

coveries in the field of applied linguistics and convert them to use, if they prove to be of value. But, most important of all, the students have come to Nijenrode because of their desire to devote their careers to international business. Thus, having a deep interest in foreigners, their mentality, civilisation and way of life, they have pressing reasons for wanting to achieve a precise practical command of written and spoken language for direct communication with their foreign counterparts.

---

1) In 1965, for instance, not only did the value of Dutch exports to the Scandinavian countries including Finland exceed ƒ 1,681,000,000.— (of which Sweden's share amounted to more than ƒ 760,000,000.—), but also there are some 50 Swedish companies operating in the Netherlands at the present time. The latter, moreover, is the major supplier of 180 important export products to Sweden and occupies second or third place in respect of 400 other items.

2) In theory, it would be a feasible and revealing experiment to test at Nijenrode the validity of these theories by arranging for two groups of students to be taught by means of the two systems respectively during their study of a particular target language over a period of two or three years. But, such an undertaking would be fraught with difficulties and might spell disaster for the 'losing group'. Why? First, the students in the respective groups would need to have the same ability and motivation at the start of the experiment and selection would have to be as random as possible. Secondly, every instructor taking part would have to be equal in teaching ability to every other and an expert in utilising his particular method, prerequisites almost impossible to guarantee or verify.

3) See Kenneth Winstrout: 'The New Age of the Visible: A Call to Study', AV Communication Review, XII, No. 1 (1964), 46-52, in which the author asserts that this is an age that 'grows ever more visual' and that 'the word is in retreat.'